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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Colby Explains CIA Mail Monitoring

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

In testimony stamped "secret" on each page, Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby has described how the CIA used to monitor the mails.

Not only did he reveal details that were left out of the Rockefeller commission report, but he admitted for the first time that the CIA had violated the law.

"It is my understanding," he said, "that it is illegal to open the mail, first-class mail—that the only justification might be during war under certain special legal authority."

Here are the highlights of his secret testimony before a House subcommittee chaired by Rep. Charles H. Wilson (D-Calif.).

• Colby disclosed that the CIA is able to read mail without opening it. A secret chemical, whose name we cannot reveal for security reasons, enables agents to decipher writing inside sealed envelopes. Colby swore, however, that the CIA has used this magic, see-through chemical only overseas. It was unnecessary to use it in the United States, apparently, as long as the postal authorities cooperated with the CIA.

• The Rockefeller report mentioned that the CIA had opened mail in Honolulu, New Orleans, New York City and San Francisco. But Colby testified that the CIA also had opened mail in Miami from April 24-23, 1961. Apparently this had something to do with the CIA's Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba on April 17, 1961.

The CIA opened the mail of

certain "CIA employees and foreign nationals who were the subject of inquiries." Their mail also was checked to find out who was corresponding with them. "These mail openings and covers allowed us to stay ahead of the Communist state of the art in chemical censorship and permitted us to devise systems to safely communicate with our (contacts) in communist areas," Colby explained.

• The CIA concentrated on monitoring the mail from the Soviet Union and mainland China. But mail also was examined from North Vietnam, Cuba and other Communist countries. Most of these countries apparently use the Soviet postal system to route their mail abroad.

• The largest mail-opening operation was in New York City in what Colby called "the East Coast project."

• The CIA gave a New York postal clerk a "Christmas bonus totaling \$3,000 for five years," said Colby, for "transporting the mailbags to the area where CIA officers handled the mail." Paying off the clerk, Colby deadpanned, "was an improper act by the agency." He refused to identify the clerk. However, we can identify him as Peter F. McAuley. He told our associate, Jack Cloherty: "It was my job to help them—the Postal Service assigned me."

Colby was asked whether past Presidents knew that the CIA had been tampering with the mails. "I don't think we can say any President individually knew," he said.

Had any Attorney General been advised of the illegal operation? "Only (John) Mitchell, is our impression," Colby replied.

The appearance of the CIA director on Capitol Hill was like an episode from a James Bond movie. Before Colby entered the hearing room, a team of electronic experts swept the premises with sophisticated detection equipment to make sure there were no hidden mikes.

Then Colby took the witness stand. In the next room, an agent sat in front of a briefcase throughout the testimony. The briefcase contained mysterious gadgets that monitored the airwaves above and around the hearing room. This was a precaution to make sure the room wasn't being bugged by a long-range eavesdropper.

After Colby left the hearing, a CIA agent accompanied the clerk who typed the proceedings. The agent confiscated all the carbons and the typewriter ribbon. He deposited them in a sack labeled "top secret trash."

With his bag of "trash," the agent departed under escort for CIA headquarters in McLean, Va.

White House Whispers—President Ford confided to friends that he hopes Israel and Egypt sign another interim peace agreement by the end of the month . . . The President also told friends he will continue to veto legislation that he thinks is inflationary.